

**NDSD Transition Team
Public Comment/Input**

(Edited for Identity and Confidentiality Purposes Only)

Interviews Conducted by NDSD Society

Received May 12, 2010

I attended NDSD for 14 years and graduated from there. I knew NDSD was a good fit because I could communicate with many different people. NDSD made it so that I could communicate clearly and effectively in sign language and made me proud of my deafness. I enjoyed all of the school activities and the fun things that I got to do with my friend while being able to communicate with everyone. I have worked at three different companies since my graduation. I hope that the deaf school will grow and expand but I am not confident the state government wants to see it grow. I prefer the deaf school over mainstreaming because of better communication with everyone.

I attended NDSD for 13 years and I switched to an oral program for one year but switched back to NDSD. Being around deaf peers helped me learn a lot more at NDSD than anywhere else and that made NDSD a good fit for me. My favorite memory was just having fun times with other students. After my graduation from NDSD I worked for a few newspapers and then a factory from where I recently retired. I am happy that my parents sent me to NDSD. If they hadn't I wouldn't have learned as much as I have. I wouldn't have had a clue about other deaf people.

I attended and graduated from the Illinois School for the Deaf, and I went to a mainstreaming program in Chicago for a few years. I have lived and worked in North Dakota for more than 20 years. I believe deaf schools are a good fit because children can be involved in everything the schools have to offer (i.e. after school activities, student organizations, etc). The deaf school met my need – I learned how to communicate well with teachers and different people, I got to participate in sports. These experiences I did not gain when I was in a mainstreaming program as well as not getting the good education. I felt I belonged at the deaf school and my favorite part of the school was sports and education. I went to a community college and earned a degree in welding. I have worked at a few companies since the high school graduation. I believe the deaf school is very important because children can have access to communication with all staff, counselors, and with each other.

I attended a public school in Iowa before coming to NDSD from where I graduated. I was taught orally but I didn't understand much so I was glad I went to NDSD because I learned a lot in sign language. My experience at NDSD was a lot less frustrating than the oral program and I enjoyed being involved in different activities and learned trades. My favorite memory of NDSD was taking History and Math classes, sports, and social time with other students. After my graduation from NDSD I farmed for many years and taught carpentry for five years before I

retired. I am really grateful that the school taught me sign language and English and in general it was a great time to be among my peers.

I attended and graduated from NDSD. While I was at NDSD I also took some classes at Devils Lake High School. When I first came to NDSD I felt awkward but liked it after a few months. I like to be able to communicate in sign language, thanks to NDSD teachers as they made me successful in college because of effective communication. My favorite memory at NDSD was watching basketball games, interacting with deaf people and go on many different field trips. I've worked at a couple places since my graduation from NDSD. I want to see more deaf children attend NDSD and keep NDSD open. I feel it is important to include social life and part of deaf community in the deaf education.

NDSD offered many trades classes that were great! NDSD really developed my communication skills and my language really blossomed. I've worked as a mechanic and drywall installer for many years since my graduation from NDSD. The school is great and gives many deaf people the chance to mingle and learn together.

I attended and graduated from NDSD. I learned a lot at NDSD and it benefited me because now other deaf people can communicate with me in American Sign Language. I was able to clearly understand what people were saying. I had a lot of fun being able to interact with boys and girls at NDSD. I attended and graduated from a community college, and have worked at a school since then. NDSD helped me to become a better deaf person, and for that reason NDSD needs to stay open.

NDSD helped me to communicate with more people and not feel isolated anymore. I am now a supervisor at a hotel.

I grew up strictly orally in a small North Dakota town with no certified deaf educator or interpreters. I was always told not to learn sign language and I thought the people using sign language looked like animals. However when I started learning sign language after my first involvement in the deaf community after my high school graduation. I attended a community college in St. Paul and met many wonderful deaf people, and the new communication mode (ASL) changed my life for better. Sign language really brightened my life and opened my world to so many different opportunities. My favorite part is being involved in drama and sports with deaf peers and not being isolated anymore. I earned a BA degree from the University of Wyoming and have worked as a USDA Natural Conservatist working with farmers in the field, making maps on computers and contracting for many years. I love being a part of the Deaf world and really enjoyed visiting NDSD because it gives me the opportunity to interact and get

involved with other deaf people – just like the hearing people! Hearing school – I didn't feel normal but deaf school – I had more opportunities.

I attended and graduated from the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind and Gallaudet University. I worked at NDSD for many years and recently retired. My work at NDSD was very challenging with various age and intellectual levels in children and enjoyed seeing NDSD alumni come in to visit. I love being able to communicate in sign language and the communication access is very important!

It is important for deaf people to be able to communication and the communication at NDSD is accessible to everyone. I received a good education at NDSD and there were many social events to attend. I also got my driver's license there. I learned a lot at NDSD. I was the first homecoming queen at NDSD in 1954! After NDSD I took several business classes in Grand Forks and worked at the Valley City Hospital for a few years before marrying my deaf husband and worked on our farm for many years. I worked a few years at NDSD as a dormitory supervisor before retiring. I hope that NDSD will grow so that more deaf students enjoy better communication at NDSD.

I attended and graduated from NDSD. I also attended National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York. The communication among people, sports, jobs and getting out into the world were a few of the many great NDSD experiences. I really learned a lot at NDSD. I have too many good memories at NDSD to pick the favorite memory. I've worked in the Head Start program for three years. My NDSD experience really proves what deaf people can do.

I attended and graduated from NDSD with one and half years away in a mainstreaming program. NDSD was a good fit for me because it was easier for me to make friends and be involved. It also was easier to understand what was going on. I have seen other deaf people like me that have experienced struggles but we can be successful. My favorite memory at NDSD was being involved in activities, running, swimming, basketball and interacting with other deaf people. I attended National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York. I work at a company that builds computer parts for hospitals. NDSD is a good experience for a family to watch a deaf child grow with people who are the same and to watch them succeed. In mainstreaming program it was frustrating and a struggle to understand. At the deaf school you will feel successful and hearing students at the mainstreaming program shy away from you which is a struggle to understand.

At first I was nervous to be away from my family, but once I got in and started mingling I made a ton of friends and I really loved it. I am really happy to talk about NDSD because it really opened

up communication for me and allowed me to play sports. NDSD really changed my life. I love playing sports and that's why I'm here – NDSD allowed me to play sports. After I graduated from National Technical Institute for the Deaf I worked at NDSD for a while and then state government for many years. I think that you should find a way to bring all kids to NDSD. I understand that parents become upset and don't want them to be away from them but they need to understand that its all about the children's education, not the parents.

Also when I was looking for a job, NDSD offered me a job as a dorm supervisor. I accepted it and was able to see all the kids playing sports under a hearing coach who knew some signs but it wasn't the same because there was a lot of frustration. So when he left I took the coaching job in basketball and track and I have been coaching for 17 years now and I can really see how important it is for the kids to be able to communicate with the coach because we share a culture and experience. I really would like to see the sport program continue.

I went to NDSD for about 15 years and graduated. My experience with the school was good and I was involved in many activities and events. Overall I remember the school being a positive experience.

I graduated from NDSD in 1968 and went to Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. I have worked at a non-profit organization in Minneapolis for more than 25 years. I am grateful for having the opportunity to learn basic reading and writing skills at NDSD as I noticed many young deaf adults do not have those skills and are having to learn these again in the Adult Basic Education program where I am an outreach coordinator.

I went to NDSD when I was 2 years old and graduated from NDSD so I practically grew up at NDSD! My parents sent me to NDSD because they felt that NDSD would be a great experience for me since it gave me the ability to socialize and communicate. Now that I look back at NDSD and I realized how much it helped me for the real world. It helped me with English and getting me into Gallaudet, getting my BA and then my Masters in Deaf Education at a college in Maryland. Now I'm a teacher at a deaf school in St. Paul. NDSD teachers were always involved and were wonderful with us. They provided many hands-on activities. I have many memories including the dorm life and the friends I made. Dorm supervisors were wonderful too because they were like parents.

I graduated from NDSD in 1973. My favorite memory was when I played for the basketball team that almost made to the state tournament. At a deaf school sports like football and basketball are good for deaf kids but mainstreaming kids won't have the same experience or opportunity since coaches would favor hearing kids while the deaf kids will sit on the bench which is not a good experience.

After graduating from NDSD I worked in my hometown and Bismarck for a few years then moved to Twin Cities where I have worked for the same company for 30 years now. I remembered Mr. _____ was a good deaf teacher and he prepared us for the future. He always told us never be late and always be on time. I used to think that wasn't important and he told me to take it serious. And for the past 30 years I have been going to work on time.

I attended and graduated from NDSD. The two activities that impacted me were learning about woodworking and socializing with other Deaf individuals. I think NDSD was a perfect fit for me. I felt that if I had to be mainstreamed in a public school I would be left out. At NDSD the students were all the same as I was. It felt like we were brothers and sisters; all the same, all Deaf. My favorite memories of the deaf school were playing sports and socializing.

After graduating, I went to Gallaudet University. I participated in three Deaflympics (high jump and 110 meter high hurdles) in Los Angeles, Bulgaria and New Zealand. These gave me the opportunity to meet Deaf individuals from across the country and around the world.

Currently I own a business building wine cellars for homeowners in different cities such as Chicago, Toronto, etc. I learned woodworking skills in the vocational building at NDSD.

I attended NDSD because my older deaf sister also attended NDSD. We both graduated from NDSD. One thing I learned from NDSD was being on time all the time. I never skipped work and I've received awards for being the best employee due to my perfect attendance. This is the good habit I learned from NDSD.

I think NDSD should continue to update and make improvements. In the future they should hire Deaf teachers to offer students the best education. In addition, NDSD should update their technology and facility. The old buildings need to change.

I attended NDSD for 13 years and graduated in 1963. My experience at NDSD was understanding deaf teachers a lot better than hearing teachers who did not know sign language very well. All other children were like my brothers and sisters. When I was home my family would never try signing with me which made me feel all alone. At school it was fun because I was able to communicate with others using sign language. When I'd go home for the summer break I couldn't stand waiting for the fall to come because I wanted to get back to the school so I could learn more. After NDSD I attended Fargo Business College for nine months then worked at three different companies in ND and California before working for a company in Twin Cities for 26 years. I recently retired. I think NDSD should hire deaf teachers rather than hearing teachers unless the hearing teachers are skilled signers and will use their skills in the classroom. Therefore the teachers should only be signing in the classrooms and not speaking. This way the message will be clear for the students.

After NDSD I have worked at a company in Minneapolis for 35 years now. I hope to retire within two years. I love meeting people wherever I go but I'll never forget the wonderful times I had at NDSD. I met so many wonderful people there. I would like to thank my parents for sending me to the school. I truly enjoyed learning at the school and I wouldn't have learned it all if it wasn't for my parents. I hope that NDSD continues to stay strong and that children are able to go to that school to enjoy the wonderful experience that I was able to experience myself.

End NDSD Alumni Comments

3/18/10 Email/Memo

Date: March 2010

To: NDSD Future Services Transition Team Members

From: *(Name removed for confidentiality reasons)*

Re: Gaps in services for deaf individuals living in our state

In the process of discussing concerns about deaf people who are falling between the cracks and identifying gaps in services for individuals who are deaf (or hard of hearing) (particularly younger deaf), the following should be considered:

What's to be done with adult deaf who may or may not have finished high school and lack the following:

- Independent living skills (unable to cook for themselves, maintain an apt., balance a budget)
- No job seeking skills
- No driver's license
- No steady job
- Poor social skills
- Below average literacy skills
- Poor communication skills

NDSD (*edited for confidentiality reasons*) recently (this week) received two separate phone calls from two separate individuals about young deaf adults with above-mentioned issues. Both callers asked, "What can NDSD do to help young deaf people in situations such as this?"

Calls were received from:

1) *(Name removed for confidentiality reasons)* - Grand Forks

2) *(Name removed for confidentiality reasons)* - Devils Lake Options program

During the *Blue Ribbon Task Force* meetings there was some discussion about the possibility of establishing (on the campus of NDSD) a 'transition program' – similar to a half-way home or educational center that could work with deaf individuals who fall within the special needs categories such as those listed above. Who would fund such a program? Would Voc Rehab provide monetary assistance to the deaf people who need such a service? Where would financial support for such a program come from? Do other states already have programs such as this established?

1/21/10 Email

Thank you so much for the hard work you are putting into this endeavors the mother of a deaf child I appreciate each one of you.

My 15 month-old daughter was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at birth. She had hearing aids put on at 4 months old. She just had a cochlear implant put in and was activated this month. She has a wonderful TOD through PIP Outreach.

Our main concern for our daughter right now would be for next fall as she is growing in her need for some outside interaction/learning/socialization, there is nowhere for her to go. We live 100 miles from the School for the Deaf, so putting her into their daycare is not an option. I would like to see an unbiased outreach Day School (for Preschoolers). I also would be willing to help with this.

Please bring up in your discussion what avenues there are for children like her. If diagnosing these children at birth in North Dakota, shouldn't we be able to offer a solid foundation of learning and social interaction for them as well.

I have just started the application process for a Hands and Voices Chapter here in ND. Please let me know if you are interested in helping in any way! www.handsandvoices.org
Good luck in your meeting.

12/15/09 Email

I read with great interest the minutes/notes from your October and November meetings. Visioning with others interested in serving deaf and hard of hearing persons from around North Dakota is an exciting proposition. Having been involved with the field of deafness for almost 30 years, both personally and professionally, it is invigorating to consider new and expanded ways to serve people who are deaf or hard of hearing and their families. I have an adult son who is Deaf and coordinate services for deaf/hard of hearing students at the University of North Dakota.

A couple of areas that come immediately to mind are technology and family support. A statement in the November report reports that "Research from Gallaudet University shows that the most influential factor regarding positive outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing students is the quality of instruction." Other research suggests that a healthy parent-child bond and strong attachment are essential for optimal language development in deaf children (Pipp-Seigel & Biringen, 1998) which will ultimately lead to successful educational (and personal) outcomes.

The task force is at the beginning of its mission to re-vision what NDSD will mean to ND residents with hearing loss - I can imagine a central resource to provide statewide interpreter services, media captioning services, training for employers (who employ deaf persons), statewide assessment team to assess deaf/hard of hearing children in their home schools - there are so many needs that with innovative solutions will improve the quality of education and life

for ND residents with hearing loss. Senior Citizens with hearing loss is another group I see your task force addressing - again, so much potential for positively impacting people's lives through education, technology and family support.

I will be watching the progress of the Future Services Plan Transition Team with great interest!

12/13/09 Email

I love your comment about ND being a "...leader rather than just followers". My son is now a year old and has a moderate hearing loss. This is all new to me but I cannot imagine where my family would be without the outreach service provided to my son and his family. I got a phone call from an audiologist saying he had a hearing loss and that before he is six months he will need to have hearing aids. Thankfully we were connected with the outreach program and they were there to offer support and answer questions. Everything about our outreach support has been great however I feel my son would benefit more with additional time with her weekly. Our goal for our son is that he will be able to enter public school like his older siblings and get a great education. However if he is not able to learn in this manner I want the option of him going to another school

12/12/09 Email

As a parent of now a young adult with a hearing impairment there are a few things I would like to express.

When he was younger the school's (local) first reaction was to send him at 3 to the School of the Deaf. Just receiving a fairly new diagnosis this was I think one of the most traumatic discussions that we had as a family. Especially when the lead administrator of the school we attended, pounded his fist on the desk and asked "what do you want from us".

Luckily we had great support from outreach staff from the School of the Deaf who came to our home frequently, combined with great staff in special ed, he stayed in the local school district, which I think is a real success story of inclusion.

As a parent I have to say it has been a difficult decision to be stuck in the middle of the hearing world and deaf world. We took a lot of insults from those who were in the deaf world and accused of us some neglect as the decision we made was not to send him to the school. That decision was not made easily or lightly. (Those insults did not come from individuals at the school) More so, from adults with hearing impairment and deafness at conferences, etc. So I think more work could be done with families to better prepare them for what may lie ahead. I feel all families should be connected to family organizations for emotional support.

The School of Deaf over the years provided great consulting services. We contacted the school frequently and were met with warm and caring responses, which in light of the above situation was a breath of fresh air. We could speak openly and frankly with people who understood. From behavior management to equipment consultation, recommendations etc, consultation was great. I would like those to increase.

He does not have a profound hearing loss, but it is quite severe and had 2 words of speech when he entered the education world...

His success, in part, I believe firmly was due to his own will and drive, dedication from special ed services and the great consultation from the School of the Deaf and the family determination on many issues in partnership with the Local education program. We also have a wonderful audiologist who provided in service training with school of deaf staff, made recommendations for accommodations in the school setting and monitoring, and attended IEP meetings. When we were seeing behavior patterns we consulted with school psychology staff for recommendations, as we were seeing OCD type behaviors that the local school had missed.

This is not to say that there is not room for the School of the Deaf, and that there should not be a campus. Families HAVE to make decisions based on what they feel is the most appropriate for their child and family. If we had not seen improvements at the local school with all of the support he received and had not persevered in that area, the campus would have been crucial for us. But he excelled. Could he have excelled more on campus. We do not know. Perhaps. I do know that socially, psychologically and behaviorally for him this would not have been a good situation, and financially, we may not have been able to make it work.

There are some things I wish we would have had in the local school setting:

1-while we received great consultation services. I think again, this should be increased. Utilize staff to go to local settings. Somehow we have gotten further and further away from that, and this is what kept him included in the local setting. It is much easier in my opinion for staff to go to outreach areas than it is for families to go to the school. While I understand it...I also understand the financial constraints and time constraints this can add to a family. Expense, time away from work to make the trip, added to the expense of therapies, trips to the therapist, audiologist, aides and adaptive equipment, depending on the family situation this can place undo financial and emotional burden on families.

2- with the wave for implants, consultation will be vital and should be adapted as such. He does not have an implant, as in doing so we were told years ago that while he was a candidate he would not have been able to play sports. So when the discussion came up, we posed the question to him at age 11 of what he wanted to do. After all, he understood fully, this was his life, and how do u take away something that was the best motivator of all for him. Sports. We could not do that to him. His decision was not to have the implants as in his words said "I have all my life to get implants, I do not have all my life to play sports". We were then insulted by hearing parents for that decision as "after all you are the parent, what you say goes" Not that easy. And in some ways, not our right to make a moral decision when he was capable and able.

3-at the time Minot State was the only facility that had a closed caption program that would have helped him immensely in real time captioning through use of a computer. We could not obtain that as the school said it was too costly.

How unfortunate as we know how important closed captioning has been in his life. Accommodations such as preferential seating etc., having a teacher of the hearing impaired can only go so far. I think for families who have their child included in the regular education setting, this is a crucial accommodation and should be utilized for all children who need it. This

would have assured that with auditory trainer, the closed captioning would have made the difference in whether he was fully understanding what was being taught as an additional accommodation. Why could this not be done through the school of the deaf? Perhaps it is and I am unaware of it.

4-Why can't we add ASL as an additional language for credit in the schools. There was no way he would have survived a Spanish or other language class. English for hoh/deaf students is difficult let alone a foreign language class. I have always thought that if ASL was offered would also open up another world for hoh/deaf students. This is acceptable in many other states as offered as a foreign language credit.

We were also told that if he was to be accepted in a 4 year college that a foreign language was going to be needed. How do we get hoh/deaf students into a 4-year program or beyond if this is an issue. Luckily the college he is at currently, did not need the foreign language. But there are schools that do enforce this. Why would we allow a student to make a decision of what post secondary he will attend based on this fact. It is silly to stifle our students in this way and I think this should be changed. ASL could be taught over IVN, would engage regular ed students, provide communication with peers. I feel it just makes good sense. What will it take to make this change? Why can ASL not be taught in schools as a foreign language credit? In this sense, he did not have the same advantage as other hoh/deaf students who attend the school as certainly he would have been taught ASL, and we would have been taught ASL. This was not taught to him but also what a difference this would have made in his life. While we asked for this in the IEP, and he had a teacher for the hearing impaired. This did not happen. It did not happen for various reasons. 1-teaching staff was too stretched, as they were pulled to help other students on an IEP (non hearing impaired students), 2-this would have been in addition to what was already being done. However, if it had been a class with credit. It would have been included as part of his day. ASL was only being taught through classes in parts of the state which were many miles away. What a huge disadvantage for he as a student and us as a family. Why not offer to all students. What better way for regular ed students to learn to communicate with deaf/hoh individuals. To many times deaf/hoh individuals are isolated due to communication! Would this not help to bridge this gap?

5-I also think a better job needs to happen with VR staff and the partnership with School of the Deaf, special ed and regular ed. Senior year is too late, in the IEP process. I also think that the goals of these students are often not challenged enough and some staff need to set higher standards of what these youth and young adults can accomplish. We were highly encouraged to send him to a trade school or Job Corp when he had much more potential and is not what he wanted to do. With graduation credits, senior year is much, much too late. How deflating when that was the recommendation and his dreams were being ignored. We fought that and he is doing well in a 4-year post secondary program.

6-family support is crucial and the best family support can come from other families. Family support needs to be as diverse as the families and in a variety of ways. We found other families on our own. However, the first family we met was when he was nearly 5 years old. How we desperately needed to speak to other families from Day 1. The isolation, fears, emotions could have been minimized had this been done. Professionals have a place and are also a wonderful support system..however..is not the end all be all. Family support is crucial. As is mentor support for students.

7-another thing regretfully that he did not take advantage of is programs offered at the school. Camps etc. I think in part due to the fear that if he went to a camp, that certainly he would get sent to school there. We tried everything to get him to go! This was a huge fear for him and leaving home. I do not know where this fear came from. I know in part some was due to what he had heard initially from administrative staff "that that is where he belonged", but if there were other conversations that took place that he overheard/misunderstood/ we may never know. Nonetheless, this was his fear. and social adaptation, etc. could have been much better had there been more interaction with the school as he grew older. As he grew older consultation became less and less. If it had continued on a regular basis, people would have been familiar, and he may have been more inclined to attend some of the great things on campus. Social isolation has been an issue for him. Some is his own choosing but in other ways, if some of the above had been done, I feel he would have excelled even further than he has. For this we feel very fortunate at how well he has adapted to any new surroundings. While socially he can be a social butterfly, in many areas he becomes introverted and does not participate. He is self conscious of his speech, becomes very critical of himself, almost to the extreme, showing still some OCD tendencies. This has taken much work on all of our parts, to also be super sensitive on how things for him will be interpreted.

Again, the school plays many rolls. I don't think that the campus should be closed but I do think that we are seeing new and great things as far as inclusion which should be embraced. Who better to provide outreach services, consultation, for students to be included than the school itself. But I also think this needs to be done throughout the students high school career as well.

Thank you

11/07/09 - Email

Good evening.

I would like the team to address the need for an Oral/Deaf Education program in the state. With the increase in Cochlear Implants in younger and younger children, I would like to think we would dedicate resources to this type of specific program something similar to those in Missouri, Minnesota and Nebraska. Please add this as a point of discussion. As the parent of a three year old, we are needing to look outside the state to find a dedicated Oral/Deaf Education program.